

Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council

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Summary of Tuesday, September 22, 2015 Meeting

TOUR OF NEW US COAST GUARD STATION

Pasadena Citizens' Advisory Council (PCAC) members and guests met at the new US Coast Guard Station at Ellington Field. Capt. Rob McLellan took the group on a guided tour of the Command Center and Vessel Traffic Service. Back in the meeting room, he talked about the Coast Guard's missions and the programs in which they interact with industry. This Coast Guard sector includes not just Houston and Galveston but also extends to Lake Charles and Port Arthur. The Coast Guard by law is charged to carry out 11 missions. Locally, they do all but icebreaking. Among these are immigration, drug interdiction, marine safety, law enforcement, search and rescue, aids to navigation, marine security, and pollution response. The agency is now part of the US Department of Homeland Security. The first priority is always saving lives.

The Command Center includes not only Coast Guard operations but also a desk for the Harris County Sheriff's Office and access to its cameras. (The cameras were funded by the Houston Ship Channel Security District, which spoke to PCAC in August.) From this room, the Coast Guard monitors the ship channel and can zoom in on anything suspicious, for example. They conduct Search and Rescue missions from here, and they track helicopters and boats during a response. The new building would be the emergency operations center for the Coast Guard in a hurricane.

Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) technology was impressive, especially to those who first saw VTS 25 years ago. Cameras, radar, and an automated identification system let the Coast Guard track ships and barges. At any time, they are tracking 600-700 vessels. They can click on a screen and see the vessel's name, cargo, where it came from and where it is going, size of ship, whether it is loaded or not, and more. The tracking begins when the vessel is overseas.

Capt. McLellan said the Coast Guard and industry are well integrated in this district and must be because there is so much industry, and the Port of Houston is the largest industrial port in the world. For example, the Coast Guard inspects plants located on the water at least annually for safety and security. Plants on the water must get their security vulnerability assessments approved by the Coast Guard. Those plants are subject to the Marine Security (MARSEC) act and the Marine Transportation Safety Act (MTSA). MARSEC security threat levels are set by the Coast Guard and posted at facilities on the water. The Coast Guard and industry serve together on committees such as the Harbor Safety Committee, the Maritime Security Committee, and the East Harris County Manufacturers Association (EHCMA) Security Committee.